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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 444th MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 30 June 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. DE SILVA (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.50 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRMAN declared the session open.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

2. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRMEN

3. The CHAIRMAN said that, regrettably, the Group of Eastern European States had been unable to nominate a candidate for the office of Vice-Chairman, and hence there would be no discussion of that agenda item. It was to be hoped, however, that the States concerned would continue to participate actively in the Committee's work.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 51/51 OF 16 DECEMBER 1996

(a) GENERAL DISCUSSION IN REGARD TO THE FUTURE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

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OTHER MATTERS

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4. The CHAIRMAN said that during the current session the Ad Hoc Committee was meeting in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/51 of 10 December 1996, in which the General Assembly had asked the Committee to examine its future work and make recommendations.

5. The previous year he had reported to the Committee the results of his consultations with the three permanent members of the Security Council which had withdrawn from the Committee concerning the Committee's work and their renewed membership of the Committee. Regrettably, to date there had been no positive developments regarding their rejoining the Committee, nor had there been any indication that those States would change their attitude. That factor should be noted in considering the future work of the Committee and even the question of its future existence.

6. He recalled that the 1971 Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace had resulted from the holding of the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries, held in Lusaka in 1970. A Meeting of the Littoral and Hinterland States of the Indian Ocean had been held in 1979 as a step towards convening a Conference on the Indian Ocean for the Implementation of the Declaration, but the planned Conference had never taken place. However,

the commitment shown by Committee members to the realization of the goals of peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region, which had led to the creation of a zone of peace, had enabled the Committee to continue its work.

7. Progress towards achieving the objectives of the Declaration had been made all the more difficult owing to geo-political factors including the former great-Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean, which perhaps explained the lack of any noteworthy successes in the Committee's work, despite its long existence.

8. Following the end of the cold war, a climate of confidence had emerged in international relations which had also superseded the great-Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean; that change had presented the Committee with an opportunity to examine multilateral and regional efforts in the interests of international peace and security, and to ascertain how those efforts could best help the Committee to achieve its own objectives. Because security was a multidimensional concept and not merely the absence of a breach of the peace or threats to peace, the Committee had made an effort to look at the issue on a broader-based front, including both the military and non-military aspects of security.

9. Having in mind that wider perspective, at previous meetings the Committee had considered new alternative approaches to achieving its principal objectives, while refusing to deviate from the basic principles of the 1971 Declaration. Delegations had made many useful proposals regarding possible new alternative approaches. However, the Committee was of the view that there was a need to foster consensual approaches on measures to achieve collective security rather than embarking on contentious disputes that would be detrimental to the achievement of that goal. It was therefore necessary to hold a detailed discussion of those issues and enliven interest in them, thereby winning over those who were sceptical about the Committee's determination to move forward.

10. Ongoing regional cooperation activities in the field of socioeconomic development were also being undertaken at the present time, and were helping to strengthen the non-military aspects of security. In addition, the recent Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries, held in New Delhi in April 1997, had underlined how important it was for the Chairman of the Ad Hoc Committee to continue informal consultations on the future of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and on the Committee's work; that clearly indicated that the non-aligned countries had confidence in the Committee's work.

11. In examining the future work of the Committee, it would be helpful to undertake a proper evaluation of the difficulties which had arisen and assess the best ways of overcoming them.

12. The Committee remained convinced that the participation of all the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean in its work was important and would assist the development of a mutually beneficial dialogue with a view to creating conditions of peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region. However, three permanent members of the Security Council and most of the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean were still unwilling to participate in the Committee's work for diverse reasons of their own, regardless of the common weal. The Committee

therefore had to give serious consideration how to proceed with its work in the future, notwithstanding those countries' refusal to participate and the negative consequences of that refusal.

13. If there were matters giving rise to apprehension or suspicion, everybody should be made aware of them in order to clarify the issues and allay fears. When great-Power rivalry had been replaced by a welcome phase of confidence and cooperation, wide-ranging opportunities had once again arisen to renew multilateral and regional efforts designed to realize the goals of maintaining peace, security and stability by means other than military alliances in the Indian Ocean region. The achievement of those goals was more realistic in the current context, and made it possible to take a fresh look at the alternative approaches adopted by the Ad Hoc Committee at its 1994 session. The list of new alternative approaches could be broadly grouped into four major categories: some possible joint strategies; techniques of preventive diplomacy; measures for arms control and disarmament agreements; and non-military threats to security.

14. It might make sense for members of the Committee to identify certain priority concerns and ideas for in-depth study. The following session or sessions of the Committee could then be exclusively devoted to the consideration and further deliberation of such ideas; negotiations might even be held at some later stage with a view to adopting a consensus document or documents. As a first step, the Committee could select from the above-mentioned list the specific proposal concerning confidence-building measures, and might possibly discuss a set of principles and guidelines for confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy and cooperation tailored to the specific needs of the region. Such a document could be brief, perhaps one or two pages long. The overall aim of such an approach would be to formulate three, four, or maybe more consensus documents of the Committee; the documents would be concise, action-oriented, and would reflect the international political climate and the present views and problems of Member States.

15. The return of the great Powers and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean to membership of the Ad Hoc Committee would undoubtedly have an enormously positive impact on the course of its discussions and would ensure their effectiveness. At the same time, serious conceptual objections still remained in that regard. Bringing those members back to the Committee could be best achieved on a dual-track basis: on the one hand, the Committee itself should demonstrate its effectiveness and ability to produce concrete results; on the other hand, States which had not actively participated in the Committee's work in recent years should show greater enthusiasm and interest and cooperate with other Member States in order to achieve the Committee's ultimate goal.

16. Such thoughts could form the basis of one possible approach or serve as a springboard for other interesting suggestions which collectively could constitute a new beginning for the Ad Hoc Committee. Before embarking on a discussion of any practical measures, more time was needed for the Chairman to continue consultations with all the members of the Ad Hoc Committee as well as with the non-participating permanent members of the Security Council and major maritime users of the Indian Ocean.

17. Mr. NAKKAWITA (Sri Lanka), referring to the statement by the Chairman, expressed his gratitude for the suggestions made by the latter, but noted that they would have to be studied in greater depth and elaborated more carefully.

18. The Ad Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean was meeting in accordance with General Assembly resolution 51/51 of 10 December 1996, by which the General Assembly had requested the Committee to examine its future work and to make recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly at the fifty-second session. The participants at the Twelfth Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Countries, held in New Delhi on 7-8 April 1997, had also requested the Chairman of the Committee to hold informal consultations on the future of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and on the Ad Hoc Committee's work. In that regard, Sri Lanka felt that the present meeting was extremely important and hoped that, at its conclusion, the Committee would arrive at certain conclusions regarding the future of the Declaration and the Committee's work, which it would then convey to the General Assembly.

19. The situation in the world, and particularly in the Indian Ocean, had witnessed major changes since the signing of the Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace in 1971. The super-Power rivalry in the Indian Ocean which had existed during the cold war was a thing of the past; tension in the region had lessened and interstate conflicts had disappeared. A number of cooperative initiatives were currently being undertaken in the Indian Ocean region designed to bring about the socio-economic development of the countries concerned; those initiatives transcended purely regional groupings. A number of initiatives were also being undertaken by regional groupings such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation. Those and other measures relating to arms control, disarmament, and so forth had had a positive impact on the situation in the Indian Ocean region and had created a propitious atmosphere for the Committee's discussion of a major peace and security initiative.

20. His delegation felt that the objectives underlying the 1971 Declaration were just as valid and relevant at the present time as they had been in 1971. The present atmosphere of peace and understanding could not be taken for granted, and the maintenance of peace was a task that required constant effort. It was essential to make persistent efforts in order to attain the objectives of maintaining peace and stability enshrined in the Declaration, and to outline directions for future cooperation between the States of the region. It was also necessary to discuss with all concerned how best those objectives could be achieved in practice.

21. The participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean was vitally important to the Committee's work, and the 1995 resolution had mandated the Chairman to conduct negotiations with the three permanent members of the Security Council which had withdrawn from the Committee in 1990. Sri Lanka recognized that the consultations designed to renew those countries' membership of the Committee had not brought positive results. It believed that consultations should continue so that those countries could participate fruitfully in the Committee's work with beneficial results accruing to all. All countries with a stake in the Indian Ocean should be invited to take part in such consultations, thereby making it

possible to achieve collectively the objectives that had been set many decades before.

22. The General Assembly resolution on the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace adopted at the forty-seventh session referred to new alternative approaches for the establishment for the zone of peace and entrusted the Ad Hoc Committee with the mandate of considering those approaches, and the conclusions reached at the Meeting of the Littoral and Hinterland States of the Indian Ocean in 1979. The Committee had considered those questions at its 1993 and 1995 sessions and had elaborated a number of proposals which were reflected in its reports for those years. It had emerged during the course of discussions that Committee members were in favour of studying measures to strengthen security and cooperation which would lead to achievement of the objectives of the Declaration. Sri Lanka believed that the Committee should discuss realistically attainable objectives and areas in which the countries of the region could cooperate with each other.

23. In addition, it was important to take account of the initiatives currently being undertaken in the Indian Ocean region in order to strengthen cooperation in the areas of trade, investment, science, technology, and so forth. The Ad Hoc Committee might think about ways in which such initiatives could be linked to achieving the objectives of the Declaration. Sri Lanka did not believe that recent initiatives ran counter to the objectives of the Declaration; on the contrary, they were in keeping with its basic postulates. In that connection it would be fruitful to hear more details from other Committee members about those initiatives and how they saw them as fitting into the provisions of the Declaration. Sri Lanka welcomed the active participation of all members of the Ad Hoc Committee in determining how the Committee should proceed in its work, and it hoped that success could be achieved by the end of the session.

24. Sri Lanka was one of the initiators of the 1971 Declaration, and was therefore eager to see it implemented. At the same time, his Government had a realistic outlook and hoped that the Committee would elaborate a collective position on the Declaration and its implementation in the light of the new realities which had come into being since its adoption in 1971.

25. The Chairman should continue his consultations with the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean with the aim of getting the three permanent members to rejoin the Ad Hoc Committee. The Chairman should also have regular informal discussions with the Committee members so that he could determine the best time to hold sessions of the Committee, because it was not desirable to fix dates and timetables in a matter as important as the transformation of the Indian Ocean into a zone of peace; it was far more important to give the Chairman a certain flexibility to determine how to proceed.

26. Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh had consistently supported the idea of forming a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean that would ensure mutual understanding and cooperation. Since poverty, hunger and lingering deprivation were the characteristic social and psychological features of most countries in the Indian Ocean region, any efforts to ensure stability and security in the region must include a definite strategy to fight and eventually eliminate

poverty. Given the limited capacity of the countries of the region, the establishment of a partnership between them and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean remained a viable alternative for sharing the resources of the region for the benefit of those living there and other peoples.

27. It was encouraging that a start had been made in evolving a new structure of economic relations between the States of the Indian Ocean region. That could serve as a springboard for evoking interest among other countries regarding the potential of the region with its dynamic economy and security system. It might seem contradictory to encourage outsiders to make a contribution while restricting the participation of regional actors. Old prejudices should not hinder the search for a more cooperative future embodied in the very idea of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace. The Committee could be a useful vehicle for conducting mutually beneficial dialogue between countries of the region and other countries with a view to strengthening peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean region. For that reason, those who had abstained from participating in the work of such an important Committee should renew their membership and contribute to its activities.

28. Mr. HANIF (Pakistan), referring to the report adopted by the Committee in 1994, said that the current session should focus attention on two of the four groups of alternative approaches elaborated in 1994, namely confidence-building measures and non-military threats to security. During informal consultations, Pakistan had proposed that at least one meeting should be devoted to consideration of reports from various countries regarding regional cooperation mechanisms. In addition, a number of meetings could be used to consider the issue of non-military threats to security. In that regard, the Committee could make a significant contribution to an exchange of opinions and information and even involve other countries in the region in such mechanisms.

29. The change that had occurred in the international situation meant that a conference of littoral and hinterland States of the Indian Ocean could be convened. That would contribute to the achievement of the objectives stipulated in the Declaration. His delegation was prepared to make its contribution to the work under way, and hoped that specific proposals would be put forward at the current session regarding recommendations to the General Assembly.

30. Mr. SERGEEV (Russian Federation) said that the Russian Federation had traditionally attached great importance to strengthening security and cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. The current situation in that region was characterized by manifold contradictions, and positive trends continued to exist alongside a significant potential for political instability and the danger of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

31. The task of establishing a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean retained its topicality for the purpose of strengthening universal peace and security. The Russian Federation therefore continued to regard the Committee's activity as an instrument for making practical efforts to ensure stability and security in the Indian Ocean region; his Government was also in favour of the participation in its work of all the leading world Powers and major maritime users of the Indian Ocean. At the same time, regional Powers should assume a key role.

32. The whole range of regional problems could be resolved only by intensifying the coordinated efforts of all the States concerned. The Committee's mandate should be modified to ensure that the range of issues under discussion included the need to promote the concept of demilitarization, confidence-building measures and the qualitative improvement of cooperation and integration in the region.

33. His delegation wished to remind the Committee of the key points in its specific proposals. First, the zone of peace could make provision for measures to limit the arms race in the region, particularly the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the most destructive types of conventional weapons. Second, Powers from outside the region could commit themselves to respecting the status of the zone, and also consider whether to reduce their military presence in the region. Third, the permanent members of the Security Council could act as guarantors of the zone.

34. Mr. HANIF (Pakistan), referring to the proposal that the summary of principles concerning the three categories agreed in 1994 should be discussed at the current session, wondered what form such a discussion would take. The Chairman should clarify whether he intended to submit a document or proposals for discussion.

35. The CHAIRMAN said that first of all it was necessary to hear States' opinions on various aspects of the topics under discussion. An initiative by the Chairman was not at issue. Delegations should state their views within the framework of the general debate on various non-military aspects of security - chiefly with regard to the set of issues concerning confidence-building measures, taking due note of the relevant experience of other United Nations organs. It might then be possible to set out the results of those discussions in the form of a summary of principles for further consideration.

36. Ms. WANG Xiaolin (China) said that China had always supported the efforts of countries in the Indian Ocean region to ensure independence, sovereignty, stability and peace in the region, and it therefore understood the desire of those countries to establish a zone of peace. As the Chairman of the Committee had noted in his statement, the positive changes in international relations could promote the achievement of the objectives which had been set. China also supported the Committee's efforts to seek new alternative approaches. It was to be hoped that the Committee would achieve success in its discussions of the relevant issues.

37. Mr. HANIF (Pakistan), referring to the possibility that the Secretariat might prepare a document to be submitted for the consideration of Committee members, said that there was only limited time available to prepare such a document, and therefore it would be advisable to hold a specific discussion of the relevant issues rather than embark on a general debate, thereby enabling a document to be submitted on the final day. Pakistan believed that the Secretariat should prepare an unofficial or reference document for discussion, whereupon the Committee could adopt a summary of principles.

38. The CHAIRMAN suggested that the question of confidence-building measures should be discussed first of all, and subsequently the Committee could focus attention on a specific issue or hold a general discussion enabling the

Secretariat to ascertain the opinions of Committee members on those issues, as well as on the question of the future work of the Committee. That would enable the Secretariat to prepare the necessary document.

39. Mr. HANIF (Pakistan) said that in his delegation's view, the Committee should consider the concept of security from a broader perspective. In so doing the Committee could, first of all, define the concept itself; second, it could consider how the concept fitted into the activity of regional forums; and third, it could elaborate its own approach to such a concept. Pakistan agreed that the second important issue requiring discussion was that of confidence-building measures tailored to the specific features of the region.

40. Ms. HAMILTON (Australia) said that she supported the Sri Lankan proposal whereby the Chairman of the Committee would have the power at current and future sessions to hold consultations with Committee members and States Members of the United Nations as a whole on the issue of the time scale for holding future meetings and the agenda of such meetings.

41. Her delegation intended to make specific comments on individual proposals regarding the new alternative approaches set out in the annex to the 1994 report. Australia was ready to participate in discussions on any proposal. Generally speaking, when preparing an urgent document for the Committee, the Secretariat proceeded on the basis of specific written proposals by delegations. In order to expedite the work of the Committee, she proposed that specific proposals should be submitted in writing.

42. The CHAIRMAN said that the latter proposal would certainly help the Secretariat in preparing any document regarding confidence-building measures with specific application to the Indian Ocean region. However, delegations might need some time to draft proposals. The Committee should indicate whether it would prefer to focus on one group of issues rather than embarking on a general discussion.

43. Mr. PAL (India) said that it must be clearly understood that the issues which had been discussed in the past and which were being discussed at the present time were objectives which had not changed, just as the original approaches had not changed. Agreement had simply been reached regarding the need to consider the question of whether there were alternative approaches which would help to reach consensus.

44. The original objectives of the 1971 Declaration had been elaborated with a view to ensuring that the Indian Ocean became a region free of great-Power rivalry. That objective remained as topical as ever. The presence of those Powers in the region had resulted in a degree of tension.

45. It was necessary to consider and discuss ideas which seemed interesting and make certain that they could serve as a basis for consensus. Second, it was important to ensure that it would be possible to achieve the original objectives on that basis. India was firmly in favour of placing the main emphasis on issues which were important to the Committee rather than focusing on secondary objectives.

46. Every day the Indian Ocean region witnessed the establishment of new associations having to do with both economic and security issues. However, those organizations operated independently, and the opportunities for the Ad Hoc Committee to contribute to their work or derive benefit therefrom were limited. His delegation would like to study in greater depth the interesting ideas put forward by the Chairman, but the Committee undoubtedly wished to focus its attention on the realization of regional objectives.

47. Mr. NAKKAWITA (Sri Lanka) said that, in his view, within the Committee attempts should not be made to minimize or diminish the importance of its overall basic goals. Conducting discussions on fundamental issues would be a difficult task because of the refusal to participate by three permanent members of the Security Council and countries which were major maritime users of the Indian Ocean. Unfortunately, all efforts to interest them in the work of the Committee had been in vain.

48. The Committee had been meeting over a period of many years; however, its work had never received the positive response which might have been hoped. Perhaps it should heed the proposal to address issues not previously discussed. A relationship existed between the work of the Committee and other initiatives, and it would be helpful to discuss those ideas, while not minimizing the importance of the Declaration's original goals. A discussion of the new realities and conditions in the Indian Ocean region would help in the realization of its general objectives.

49. Because of lack of time, it was in his view pointless to prepare a document on new and alternative approaches which would address confidence-building measures. It would be useful to hear from all delegations and prepare a report for review by the Committee and subsequent presentation to the First Committee. At the next meeting, important issues could be discussed and lessons learned from the experience of other countries taking part in the conduct of initiatives in the Indian Ocean.

50. The CHAIRMAN took note of the concern over lack of time and suggested that consideration of that matter should be deferred to allow the Secretariat to prepare the document. In that regard, delegations should provide the Secretariat with their thoughts and views, on the basis of which the document would be prepared for consideration at the next session of the Committee. He requested members of the Committee to express their views on the proposed programme of work.

51. Mr. PAL (India) said that in order for the talks on confidence-building measures to be effective, the entire region must participate in them. In his view, by requesting the Secretariat to prepare a code of guiding principles the Committee would be assigning to it an extraordinarily complex task which it was not competent to perform.

52. Mr. HANIF (Pakistan) said that he took it that the Committee would reach agreement concerning the concept of security in its broader meaning. The current or the next session of the Committee could be devoted to the drafting of a unified position concerning that concept. Each member of the Committee, and also the Secretariat, could submit material. He proposed that Committee members should initially consider the following issues: how they understood the concept

of security; whether they should wait for parties outside the region to determine the directions of work, or whether the members of the Committee should conduct their work independently, then involve the other parties, or present the results of the work done to them during the course. He fully supported the statement by the representative of Sri Lanka.

53. Mr. KABIR (Bangladesh) said that he agreed with the representatives of Sri Lanka and Pakistan. In his view, the Committee should continue its work on the least controversial issues. That would lay the foundation for attaining the more serious goals and involving the abstaining parties in the Committee's work to achieve the goals established 25 years earlier.

54. The CHAIRMAN, summarizing the proposals made, said that the Committee would continue its activities in order to attract the interest of the three permanent members of the Security Council in its work. In that regard, he suggested that members of delegations should indicate whether they had specific ideas or submit written comments or memorandums so that the Secretariat could prepare the requested document for consideration.

55. Mr. NAKKAWITA (Sri Lanka) said that work was proceeding rather slowly and that, as before, delegations were not ready to make any recommendations or offer any formulations for the report. He proposed that the meeting should be suspended and that subsequently statements by other delegations should be heard. Delegations of countries not belonging to the region might also wish to state their proposals and views.

The meeting was suspended at 12.25 p.m. and resumed at 12.35 p.m.

56. Mr. ROWE (Australia) said that there were two approaches to the consideration of the Committee's future work. The first approach would be to consider what topics in the field of peace and security in the Indian Ocean the Committee should tackle next. Perhaps it could choose one or more topics from the new alternative approaches annexed to the report on its 1994 session for detailed examination at future sessions. The Australian delegation, as always, was prepared to participate in a serious discussion of any subject related to security in the Indian Ocean, if all other members of the Committee could also agree to such a discussion.

57. It was the view of his delegation that the request to consider the Committee's future work was not simply asking the Committee to propose a new agenda of subjects for discussion; it was a request to the Committee to reconsider how it worked, the relevance of its work, the resources it consumed and the level of interest of other Member States. That question must be considered in the light of the fact that 1997 was the year of reform. All areas of the work of the United Nations must be critically examined, and sacrifices must be made.

58. One suggestion had been that the Committee should not continue to hold days-long substantive sessions unless it had agreement among its members to consider in depth a particular security-related issue. Currently, however, it was not possible to say when that would happen. The Committee should only meet, during the sessions of the First Committee, to consider the resolution on the

Indian Ocean and to review the status of its future work. Furthermore, the consideration of the resolution could be biennialized.

59. In that way, the Committee would continue to exist but it would work only when it was agreed that there were matters requiring its attention. Thus, the responsibility would lie with members of the Committee seriously interested in its work, as well as those with differing views, to ensure that the resources of the United Nations and its Member States were used productively.

60. The sessions of the Committee in the context of meetings of the First Committee could also be used to exchange information on developments at the regional level.

61. In March, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation, composed of 14 littoral and island States of the Indian Ocean, had been officially launched at a ministerial meeting in Mauritius. That Association was a forum for dialogue on economic issues and laid the foundations for cooperation designed to expand trade through free and open markets, thereby raising living standards in the region.

62. The countries participating in the Association had economies in different stages of development and varying political systems, and held frankly different views on some international issues. The inauguration of the Association, after two years of preparation, showed that a spirit of cooperation among those countries could be built, in order to find both common goals and a common perspective on how to reach them.

63. Attempting to use the forum to discuss security issues would be counterproductive. Experience in other regions had shown that economic cooperation and dialogue around related issues had yielded positive security benefits and might in time give rise to formal security dialogues.

The meeting rose at 12.50 p.m.